

# BREAKING INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLES OF MALTREATMENT

Although many scholars research trauma and traumatic effects on the brain, recent scholarship on resilience and posttraumatic growth (PTG) moves beyond identifying how trauma can transform the mind and the body by discussing how survivors of trauma can overcome traumatic experiences. There are healthy academic debates on the differences between resilience and PTG. *Resilience is defined as the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change* (Werner, 1995), whereas *PTG defines and measures the change experienced as a result of a traumatic life event*. Regardless of whether you are Team Resilience or Team PTG, both terms focus life after trauma.

A recent article (Woods-Jaeger, Cho, Sexton, Slagel, & Goggin, 2018) explored methods a group of parents used to break cycles of maltreatment with their children. Mothers with traumatic life experiences admitted that parenting reminded them of painful past experiences (Wright, Fopma-Loy & Oberle, 2012) and in some cases influenced their decisions to take significant time away from their children (Kistin, Radesky, Diaz-Linhart, Tompson, O'Connor, & Silverstein, 2014). Parents with traumatic life experiences can develop coping skills to address their past, while planning and preparing for a healthier and safer future for their children.

Resilience promoting factors that emerged from the study were: *open communication, expressions of love, and close family relationships.*

1. **Open communication** was defined as when parents speak openly and honestly with their children. Many participants in the study reported preparing their children for traumatic life experiences or making sure their children did not go through what they went through in their lives. They were honest with their children about their life experiences and expressed that they wanted better for them.

2. **Nurturing children** by showing them love was another way parents built trust with their children. In addition to expressing love with hugs, kisses, and positive affirmations, parents voiced that spending time with their children showed their level of commitment to their relationship and made children feel special.





**3. Increasing social capital and having close family relationships** can also promote resilience and help break cycles of maltreatment. When families rally behind a child, the child feels like their needs are met and love and trust can develop as a result. Close relationships meant showing up for important life events, being there when the child needed them, and feeling the sense of lasting connection with others.

Although this particular study was not generalizable, the results shared were verified in a Community-Based Participatory Research project where the parents controlled the outcomes of the study. The knowledge participants shared adds to the growing body of literature supporting research on resilience and PTG.

*The Texas Alliance for Child and Family Studies (TACFS) shares this information so organizations might use this knowledge to build and/or improve existing parenting courses and services.*

#### Sources:

*Kistin, C. J., Radesky, J., Diaz-Linhart, Y., Tompson, M. C., O'Connor, E., & Silverstein, M. (2014). A qualitative study of parenting stress, coping, and discipline approaches among low-income traumatized mothers. Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 35, 189-196.*

*Tedeschi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (1996). The posttraumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9, 455-471*

*Werner, E. E. (1995). Resilience in development. Current directions in psychological science, 4(3), 81-84.*

*Woods-Jaeger, B., Cho, B., Sexton, C., Slagel, L., & Goggin, K. (2018). Promoting Resilience: Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Adverse Childhood Experiences. Health Education & Behavior, 45(5), 772-780.*

